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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT PASS TO NPS - STEPHEN MORRIS AND RICHARD SUSSMAN
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: UNESCO SCUL

SUBJECT: UNESCO - WORLD HERITAGE BANDARIN DEBRIEF

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Preah Vihear and Jerusalem were the key subjects in an hour-long discussion with World Heritage Director Bandarin, noting several issues that could provide difficulties during the World Heritage Committee meeting in July. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) State Department IO Deputy Assistant Secretary Gerry Anderson and Ambassador Oliver met UNESCO's World Heritage Center Director Francesco Bandarin on April 9 for a debrief on current issues during Mr. Anderson's presence in Paris for the 179th Executive Board.

Bombs and Mines

¶3. (SBU) Mr. Bandarin opened the meeting by describing several blocks of issues that will shape July's World Heritage Committee (WHC) meeting in Quebec. They include issues dealing with the State of Conservation of WH sites, Sites in Danger, Nominations, and Policy issues. Bandarin noted that while there are certain issues that are already sure to spark intense debate, which he called the "bombs", his concern is trying to identify the unseen "mines" which have not yet been anticipated.

¶4. (SBU) Bandarin mentioned that some possible sites that could be put on Danger List, based on the recommendations of the advisory bodies now under review, include the Tower of London and Riga. He added that, in the past, the very act of proposing a site for the Danger List creates enormous political pressure, prompting the Member State to take action, and has proven to be a greater motivator than actually putting a site on the List. He also said that Machu Picchu is a candidate for the Danger List, due to the general lack of control of the site, illegal habitats and overall sprawl. Bandarin mentioned that no US sites have been identified as candidates for the Danger List.

Urbanization and Outstanding Universal Value

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver said that the problem of balancing the natural growth of cities and maintaining outstanding universal value (OUV) is going to be a complicated problem for the WHC in the future, given the cases of London, Riga, Florence, St. Peterburg and other cities. Bandarin said that there is a new initiative on the subject of problematic urbanization of WH sites. The issue is now being referred to as the "contemporary role of historic urban areas". Bandarin said that the WHC is asking the Director General to help develop proposals that will go through the Executive Board and ultimately to the General Conference as the WHC is in need of some guidelines on difficult cases in this context.

¶6. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver warned that we must be careful in moving

forward to ensure that we clearly define as to what aspect of WH issues is appropriate for the Executive Board to engage in, what is appropriate for the WHC, for the Culture Sector, SHS, and all of the different players in this area where roles overlap.

Buffer Zones and Periodic Reporting

¶17. (SBU) Bandarin then talked about the issue of "buffer zones", and the fact that there is an enormous backlog of work to be done in making a "retrospective inventory", as many sites do not have identified buffer zones, (e.g., the pyramids in Egypt). Bandarin went on to say that the debate regarding buffer zones as "regulated territories" always returns to the question of what is the OUV of each site, adding that in the case of many of the older sites the World Heritage Center must help them "invent" their OUV's, as they were inscribed when less exacting guidelines were in place.

¶18. (SBU) He added that this retrospective inventory, as a part of the WH Center's desire to launch a periodic reporting system of WH sites, is causing a problem in itself, as a decision taken in the 1990's to begin with the Arab states is now raising questions, as they do not wish to be the "guinea pigs" for the process.

Jerusalem

¶19. (SBU) Bandarin then turned to Jerusalem, and the fact that the Arabs are again complaining about the Israelis having put "Jerusalem" on their tentative list, which means extending boundaries to include Mount Zion. While this is not a new issue, as Israel's Jerusalem candidature, dating from 2000, is clearly marked with the footnote, "... to postpone further consideration of this nomination proposal until an agreement on the status of the City of Jerusalem in conformity with International Law is reached, or until the parties concerned submit a joint nomination..." (The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls was inscribed on the WH List in 1981 by

Jordan).

A Problem Bigger than Mughrabi Gate ?

¶10. (SBU) Bandarin then spoke about Mughrabi Gate, noting that he hopes the WHC will appreciate the progress made by all parties, demonstrating the success of UNESCO's role as mediator. He then turned to a problem which he feared could potentially be much more serious than the Mughrabi Gate for the Arabs. He described a synagogue now under construction in the area of the Western Wall where the Israelis are planning to create a large underground area for prayer which, while next to the Temple Mount walls, also lies beneath the Moslem quarter. Bandarin fears that this could potentially become a problem far larger than Mughrabi Gate. The State of Conservation report on Jerusalem being prepared for Quebec will touch upon the synagogue construction, potentially leading to a difficult discussion in Quebec.

Cities and Urban Landscapes

¶11. (SBU) Bandarin also talked about another problematic nomination: Buenos Aires. He said that this is part of a new trend in nominations, where cities and urban landscapes are being proposed for inclusion on the WH List. The difference, he said, is that there is a heavy focus on "intangible" elements, (e.g., citing a neighborhood where the tango was born), potentially broadening the meaning of OUV to the point of losing a clear sense of what the definition stands for. He noted that ICOMOS has not accepted the nomination, but expects to see similar nominations in the future, including Rio de Janeiro.

¶12. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver mentioned the problem of "pre-approved nominations", like the case of the Baha'i's, where intangible elements, like religion, are brought into the mix, raising the viability of nominations of sites that under current guidelines, wouldn't normally pass muster.

Preah Vihear

¶13. (SBU) This opened the discussion to the policy of "anticipating nominations" and "pre-inscriptions", which Ambassador Oliver believes are dangerous practices. In the case of Preah Vihear,

Ambassador Oliver said that the WHC in 2007 had left Cambodia with the clear impression that if serious progress were made regarding certain gaps in its management plan, the WHC would very likely approve the site during the Quebec meeting.

¶14. (SBU) Bandarin described Preah Vihear as a "total stalemate", where the Cambodians are "playing with words and facts". He said that, while there are many technical problems, in fact, the issue is a political one between Thailand and Cambodia.

¶15. (SBU) Ambassador Oliver raised the possibility of having the Cambodians accept the creation of a separate International Coordination Committee (ICC) for Preah Vihear in the event the site is inscribed on the WH List. She noted that the Cambodians had suggested an ICC for Preah Vihear, but only as an adjunct of the existing Angkor Wat ICC. This solution, she said, would not give the Thais a sufficiently strong voice, making the solution unacceptable. The question of how to "institutionalize" Thailand's voice in such a structure, if resolved, could lead the way to resolution of the current problems.

Recentralizing Discussions at UNESCO

¶16. (SBU) Bandarin indicated his concerns that the Cambodians are moving in a direction that would effectively cut the Thais out of any serious "joint" management of the site. It was noted that the Thais did not attend the recent "technical meeting of experts" organized by UNESCO's Culture sector in late March. Bandarin said that that meeting was part of ADG Culture Francoise Riviere's effort to "recentralize" discussions in Paris, as certain players in the field have taken positions too closely aligned to the two host countries. Ambassador Oliver suggested that any "public" meetings on Preah Vihear would be doomed to failure, and that private negotiations would be the only way to advance.

Future Events

¶17. (SBU) At the close of the meeting, Bandarin mentioned a recent visit to Bahrain, where he saw the largest pre-historic "mound" necropolis of some 50,000 burial mounds. He also informed us of UNESCO's plans for a major ceremony next September 10 in connection with the re-erection of a monumental obelisk in Ethiopia (financed by Italy), timed to mark the end of Ethiopia's millennium celebrations. OLIVER